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INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 5577
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3296
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3161
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 3820
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1102
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENTCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 3830
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001066

SENSITIVE

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SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: ENVIRONMENTAL NGO EDUCATES
DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN

11. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Internet distribution

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: During the past few years, an unregistered civic group in the town of Hazar, on the Caspian coast, has organized summer ecology camps for children from disadvantaged families. The group was unable to register as an NGO because it does not operate on a year-round basis. Despite being an unregistered organization, the group managed to successfully conduct OSCE and U.S. Embassy-funded projects, largely due to the group leader's personal contacts with local authorities. END SUMMARY.

SUMMER ECOLOGY CAMPS

13. (SBU) On August 20, Inessa Perminova, Project Leader of the Initiative Group of Hazar Town Residents (Hazar Group), briefed Political Assistant on the background and activities of the group. Perminova's group, consisting of civic activists living in Hazar town on the Caspian coast, organized summer and autumn ecology camps for children from disadvantaged families and orphans in Hazar. The Hazar Group organized these activities since 2006 using funds provided by international donors. In the framework of the Caspian Environmental Program (CEP), in the spring of 2006, Hazar Group implemented a project "Green Town by Schoolchildren's Hands," planting over 300 trees near each school in the town and holding ecological contests among schoolchildren. In 2006 and 2007, the Group conducted OSCE-funded summer and autumn camps for orphans and children from disadvantaged families at a local sanatorium. At these camps, children learned about environmental protection, as well as improving their own health. In 2008, Hazar Group also conducted OSCE and U.S. Embassy-funded ecological camps. The municipality of Hazar supported the group's projects, assisting with finding appropriate participants, providing water and electricity, and doing technical repairs when needed. The project was

registered at the Ministry of Economy and Development.

REGISTRATION ISSUE

¶4. (SBU) The Hazar Group is an unregistered organization. In the spring of 2008, Perminova attempted to register the group at the Ministry of Justice. Due to the group's lack of working capital and the seasonal nature of its activities, she was told the group would not qualify for registration. Perminova is a geologist and a full-time employee of the State Scientific Research Institute of Geology. She works on the group's projects during her vacations and, since the projects take place only once or twice a year, she decided not to further pursue registration for the group. In order to implement the OSCE-U.S. Embassy-funded project, Perminova obtained a license to conduct social activity and canceled it after the project was completed.

MUNICIPAL ASSISTANCE AND FUTURE PROJECTS

¶5. (SBU) Perminova said the only problem implementing the projects was a shortage of drinking water, a common problem in Hazar. Drinking water is normally brought to Hazar from Balkanabat, the provincial center of Balkan province. According to Perminova, Hazar's municipal officials supported the group's projects from beginning to end by supplying drinking water and electricity, allowing use of the sanatorium's premises, and helping with gathering the

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participants from around the town. When something broke down, it was fixed after a phone call to the municipality. The project enjoyed the support of local authorities because of Perminova's personal contacts. She had worked in Hazar in the past and knew the town and many of its residents very well. Concerning the prospects for similar projects in the future, Perminova said the sanatorium where she held the camps in the past is now demolished, to be replaced by a new 250-place sanatorium. Nevertheless, subject to funding, she may consider organizing children's daytime eco trainings at one of the town's schools.

POOR INFRASTRUCTURE AND RICH ENERGY COMPANIES

¶6. (SBU) Perminova said that Hazar has poor infrastructure and roads. It takes 1.5 hours to get to Hazar by car from Balkanabat, along an extremely dangerous road. Yet, according to Perminova, none of the foreign oil companies working in Hazar do anything to show corporate social responsibility, such as building a new road or improving the municipal water supply. "Only Dragon Oil brings Christmas gifts to orphans residing at the sanatorium, others do not do even that," Perminova said.

¶7. (SBU) COMMENT: The Hazar authorities' support of the group's activities is a positive step reflecting their awareness of local ecological and social problems, and their willingness to solve them with the assistance of civil society. The Hazar Group's focus on Working with disadvantaged children on a politically "neutral" topic such as ecology also facilitated project implementation. Still, the success of Perminova's group in collaborating with local authorities is due to a large extent to her personal contacts with Hazar authorities, who let her implement the project even though it is an unregistered group. Without such contacts, it would have been impossible to function. END COMMENT.

MILES